

## New regional rep



*Leanne  
Montgomery*

The Central Region is happy to announce that Leanne Montgomery of Galva has accepted the position of serving on the State-wide Foster Parent Advisory Council for Central Region.

Leanne and husband Ted have been married for 28 years. They have fostered 37 children and maintain a wonderful outlook and sense of humor. Leanne formerly worked for a private agency as a resource development specialist. Currently, she is the full-time manager of the home and the six children who live there, including five teens and a 10 year old.

The key to their success, according to Leanne, is the ability for the adults and children to adapt to each other and everyone's unique needs and personalities. The Montgomerys express that they would not have been as successful as foster parents without the support and encouragement from the Cambridge and Galesburg DCFS staff and foster parent support specialist. Leanne looks forward to representing other families on the council and staying active in foster care.

## Regional Administrator thanks caregivers



*Robert T.  
Blackwell*

As we thank you and celebrate the work you do during Foster Parent Appreciation Month, please know that we are also considering caregivers during the other 11 months of the year.

I believe you will find 2006 to be an exciting and pivotal year in the Central Region. Many of the new initiatives begun in 2005, such as the Child and Youth Investment Teams (CAYIT) and the Integrated Assessment Program, will gain more momentum to improve our child welfare practices in Illinois. Many of our foster families are finding that these initiatives are more inclusive of you as the caregiver, birth family members and the youth themselves in critical case decisionmaking. This is our intent, and we believe that better outcomes related to safety, well-being and permanency will result from this increased participation.

In April, the Central Region fully implemented a reorganization of its workforce that is of historic proportions. In a unique plan

negotiated between DCFS management and its union, the Department re-distributed existing staff to offices of greatest need and is hiring new staff to support the tremendous caseloads under which current staff are operating. Staff will be organized by the specialties of Child Protection, Intact Family Services and Placement Services. This reorganization should dramatically enhance the Department's ability to provide services to our families.

Caregivers should feel the impact of these initiatives in terms of better support from Department staff and improved services to the youth that we protect and serve. All of these initiatives, and more, will be expanded upon in future trainings. I encourage your participation in these trainings and personally delight in the opportunities that I have to meet and talk with you about the important work that we do together.

Fasten your seat belts and expect great things in 2006.

**Robert T. Blackwell**  
**Regional Administrator**

## LAN Corner

Child and Adolescent Local Area Networks (LANs) are a group of agencies, organizations, and community members within a geographic area that responds to the expressed needs of the community. The LANs are available to provide planning assistance, services and financial support to foster parents.

In Local Area Network #20 in Peoria County, the program *Support Our Students* is making a difference in school life for students and their families. Counseling and Family Services administers the program in Columbia and Lincoln schools. Crittenton Center's program serves Mark Bils and Calvin Coolidge schools. These programs are designed to work with youth at risk of truancy, suspension, or expulsion.

By way of example, one family was having difficulty controlling their child's behavior. The youth was involved in gang activities and was suspended from school due to disruptive behaviors. Crittenton Center's Family and School Liaison linked the family to resources to focus on the problems and begin curbing disruptive actions. In time, the youth was attending school regularly and staff reported positive behavior changes in the youth. The family is active with therapeutic services.

For more information on services in LAN 20, contact Jane Weede at 309-687-7503.

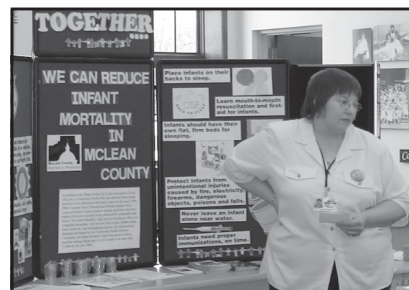
## Celebrating diversity in Central Region

On February 24, 2006, the Galesburg and Cambridge field offices jointly hosted the second annual Black History Month celebration at the Galesburg field office. This celebration included a potluck organized by the office staff and foster parents, which included traditional Southern cooking "soul foods" and delicious desserts. Beyond home-made foods, the celebration emphasized the fact that the African-American community has a rich heritage of supporting one another, their families and the community, long before "foster care" became the entity that it is today.

Ruth McFadden, a DCFS and One Church One Child retiree brought her extensive African-American doll collection to the luncheon, where she shared how these dolls represent every aspect of her own history of caring for abused and neglected children. The dolls were not only beautiful, but a true legacy and inspiration to both staff and foster parents. The Galesburg and Cambridge staff presented McFadden with a historical doll to add to her collection as an expression of appreciation.

DCFS foster parent Rev. Jerry Cato opened the celebration with a prayer of thanks and blessing upon the gathering and all the wonderful food. Then, two guest speakers from within the department shared information with foster parents. Freddie Higgins, Office of Education and Transition Services answered a myriad of questions regarding the many positive changes involving young adults making their way through independence and advanced education. Foster parents put him through the paces with their many insightful suggestions and inquiries regarding services for transitioning youth. Marsha Jones and other staff from the Rock Island field office also traveled to Galesburg to share their DCFS experiences.

This celebration is an example of embracing the diversity within small communities in rural Henry and Knox counties. DCFS field offices don't wait until each May to celebrate and show their foster parents the appreciation they deserve.



Marie McCurdy, case manager,  
McLean County Health Department

On April 11, Healthworks of McLean County sponsored its 2nd Annual Health Fair for all foster and residential children with The BabyFold, DCFS, Catholic Charities and The Children's Foundation. The community came together to provide screenings and health information for 75 children.

## Caregiver Institutes offer help to navigate transitions

The 2006 Caregivers' Institute nine-stop statewide tour came to Central Region in Springfield on February 25, Champaign on March 4, and Peoria on April 8. The DCFS Division of Clinical Services and Professional Development's Office of Foster Parent Support Services, along with the divisions of Service Intervention and Operations, rallied a full slate of experts for a dynamic presentation on ways caregivers can help young people make effective transitions within and out of the child welfare system.

"These Institutes are our way to say thanks to caregivers by sharing information to help them as they help our young people," said Deputy Director Velma Williams.

The Saturday session started with several youth in care describing how the adults in their lives contributed to them moving successfully toward adulthood.



*Youth speakers Luvenia Sims (left) and Desiree Taylor (middle) shared their foster care experiences, with Mary White offering the caregiver's perspective. David West of DCFS led the discussion.*

Likewise, caregivers also heard the adult perspective on how to enhance that relationship. That personal testimony led into Regional Administrator Bob Blackwell's opening remarks describing the Department's strategic direction and how caregivers will be involved.

The Integrated Assessment and the CAYIT program are two DCFS initiatives that call for caregivers to be better informed when cases are opened and more involved during the life of the case. Representatives from the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council also encouraged participants to use the local councils as a way to solve problems and raise their voices.

The second portion of the training provided practical tips on how to move youth successfully toward self-sufficiency. The first important step is education. The Local Area Network (LAN) Liaisons provided details on community programs to support students at-risk of suspension, expulsion, and truancy. The group also learned about resources from the DCFS Education Advocates to help caregivers work with schools more effectively. Since the home can also be like a classroom, caregivers were coached on how to find "teachable moments" to shore up life lessons on finances, employment and practical matters.



*Regional Administrator Bob Blackwell (right) talks with John Kasper of the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services after his presentation on employment for youth.*

Young people prepared with a foundation of education and life skills will be ready to move on to college or employment. Staff from the Office of Education and Transition shared with caregivers many services and programs for both options. Perhaps spurred by the thought of youth embarking on successful, self-sufficient lives, the caregivers left the training informed, enthusiastic and energized.

"My wife drags me to these trainings and I usually hate them. This one was fun and I learned a lot. I am coming back next year," said one foster father (who shall remain anonymous).

The Office of Foster Parent Support Services is taking that feedback and evaluations from the series of institutes to make plans for 2007. For more information or to receive materials, contact the office at 217-524-2422.



# Central Region Training Calendar

## Integrated Assessment Training

### Champaign Area

217-355-4644

**CHAMPAIGN** *Parkland College* **NORMAL**  
June 10 (Sat) 9-11 a.m. June 3 (Sat)

**DANVILLE** *Comm. Church of God*  
June 8 (Thu) 6:30-8:30 p.m.

**BabyFold**  
9-11 a.m.

## Virtual Training

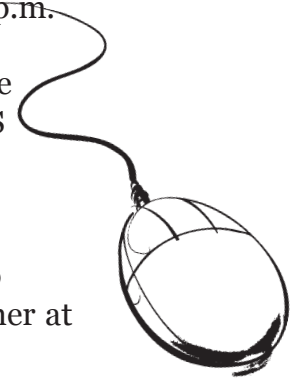
The DCFS Office of Training has blended technology with training in offering the new Virtual Training Center. The first on-line training for foster parents is called "Child and Family Team Meetings for Caregivers. Foster parents can earn three hours of training credits as they learn how a Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) helps the family and what the Caregiver's role is in the meeting.

Foster Parents can take this course using a computer in their home or coming to a DCFS facility, according to the schedule below:

- Thursday, June 1 from 12:45 p.m. - 4 p.m.  
Also on-site at DCFS Computer Lab - 227 S. 7th St., Springfield
- Monday, June 5 from 12:45 p.m. - 4 p.m.  
Also on-site at DCFS Computer Lab - 6201 S. Emerald, Chgo
- Monday, June 5 from 6:15 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.
- Saturday, June 24 from 8:45 a.m. - 12 p.m.
- Tuesday, July 11 from 6:15 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.
- Thursday, July 27 from 12:45 p.m. - 4 p.m.

To register for the foster parent online training, caregivers may contact the DCFS registration unit at 877-800-3393.

To obtain more information about the new on-line foster parent training schedule go to [www.DCFStraining.org](http://www.DCFStraining.org) or email Jean Maher at [jmaher@idcfs.state.il.us](mailto:jmaher@idcfs.state.il.us).



## Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

### Peoria Area • 888-507-7433

**MACOMB** *First Presbyterian Church*  
June 22 & 29 (Thu) 6-9 p.m.

**PEORIA** *Lutheran Social Svcs.*  
June 12 & 19 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.

### Champaign Area • 217-355-4644

**CHAMPAIGN** *Parkland College*  
June 5 & 12 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

**DANVILLE** *Comm Church of God*  
June 3 (Sat) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

## Central Connections

### Sponsor

Robert Blackwell, DCFS  
Central Regional Administrator

### Regional Reporter

Mary Bullock  
2001 N.E. Jefferson St.  
Peoria, IL 61603  
Phone: 309-671-7900  
Fax: 309-671-7906  
E-mail: [MBullock@idcfs.state.il.us](mailto:MBullock@idcfs.state.il.us)

Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.